U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Runs Pulse to Help Sturgeon

OMAHA – With all of the reservoir and river conditions right, the Army Corps of Engineers initiated a "pulse" of water from the system of Missouri River reservoirs beginning on May 12. This increase in releases from Gavins Point Dam is intended to promote spawning of the endangered pallid sturgeon in the Missouri River.

On May 1, the Corps announced that the planned pulse would be delayed until later in the month because all the factors that are weighed in the decision on its timing were not in place. These include the water temperature of 61 degrees below Gavins Point, current and forecasted downstream river flows, actual and forecasted precipitation and nesting activity of the protected least terns and piping plovers.

"We are committed to the protection and recovery of threatened and endangered species like the pallid sturgeon," said Brig. Gen. Gregg Martin, Northwestern Division commander. "At the same time, we will continue to serve the other authorized purposes for which the main stem dams were built and the river was channelized. The Corps teamed with the Fish and Wildlife Service, tribes and states, and a host of stakeholders to develop a plan for spring pulses that benefits the fish with the least possible impact to other users of the river and reservoirs. I think we've struck a good balance," he said.

The pulse will be 9,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). Releases will be incrementally increased above the 16,000 cfs currently being provided to support minimum navigation. The peak release of 25,000 cfs will be held for two days. As the pulse travels downstream, these flows are forecasted to raise the river the middle of next week by 2.5 feet near Omaha and taper off to about a foot in central Missouri the week after. Beginning May 16, releases will be gradually reduced over 10 days until they reach the level necessary to maintain minimum service flows.

Water was staged in Fort Randall and Gavins Point reservoirs in March and April to supply what is needed for the pulse. This effort will reduce the negative impacts to storage in Oahe reservoir during the annual forage fish spawn. Over the course of the year, the impact of the pulse will reduce the levels of the upper three reservoirs by around 0.2 of a foot.

The 2003 Amended Biological Opinion published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identifies pulses in the spring from Gavins Point as part of the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of the endangered pallid sturgeon.